

Floor Finishing Mythology, Part 1

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One of the great quests in the contract cleaning world is to properly apply coatings to floors so clients are dazzled by perfection to the point they become repeat customers. The mythos surrounding the process is that most cleaning professionals know how to achieve this level of excellence, while in reality they don't!

The prevailing attitude from the pros is they've seen it all, done it all, and know it all. As a supplier of floor finishing products, I get this lackadaisical attitude regularly. No offense intended to hardworking contractors – I'm just simply stating a fact. For many contractors this brashness results in declining profits.

Here's another fact: the cleaning realm evolves over time. Advances in technology tend to render prior methods obsolete, or at the least, antiquated. It takes continual updating of product knowledge and procedures to remain a floor finishing legend. Therefore, it is imperative that cleaning professionals humble themselves to the idea that they should seek the latest information prior to tackling every floor-finishing job!

Just because a cleaning pro has applied coatings successfully in the past does not mean that the same pro can do it again in the future. Experience is outweighed by advances in product engineering. Case in point: I have personally witnessed better floor finishing jobs performed by rank amateurs than by professional floor care specialists simply because the amateurs are careful to follow the latest methods and instructions. Amateurs tend to be more conscientious because they "feel the pain" directly. Applying floor coatings is physically draining, mentally tiring, and a sizable monetary investment.

Beautiful floors bespeak cleanliness. That's

why floor care is a lucrative business. Unfortunately, much floor work can be a waste of time and money, either for the customer, or contractor, or both, due to procedural deficiencies. Before tackling a floor coating job, know these things:

TYPE of floor to be coated.

COATING recommended by flooring manufacturer or other authority.

AMOUNT of square footage to be coated.

PROCEDURE for applying the particular coating.

TOOLS needed for applying the coating most efficiently.

LABOR broken down by hours, people, and wages to completion.

TOTAL COST of all products and labor required.

Each item above represents a volume of information. How a contractor assimilates and handles the data affects profits. I recommend study, training, and practice.

Type of Floor Coating

Floor coatings fall into two major categories: water-based or solvent-based (oil-based). Water-based products include standard acrylic floor finishes, more commonly and incorrectly referred to as waxes, water-based polyurethanes, and latex paints. Solvent-based finishes include polyurethanes, epoxy paints, true natural waxes, and cure-seal concrete products. Each of these floor finish types requires a different set of rules and tools for preparation, removal, and application.

Another myth about floor coatings is the main reason for using them: they improve the appeal of floors – everyone wants a shine, you

know. While partially true, I contend that protecting floors from damages due to wear, tear, and aging are the main reasons for using coatings. This is especially true when it comes to resilient floor types (man-made materials like vinyl).

My own showroom floor here at Marko Janitorial Supply was installed in 1971, an Armstrong Brand “no wax” rolled vinyl. This floor was designed to last up to eight years. By applying a quality acrylic finish despite the “no wax” claim, keeping it clean, buffing the surface occasionally, it still looks fabulous! This is the type of performance a floor specialist would want to sell and provide with every job. It’s not about the shine; it’s about curb appeal and cost control! Without protecting our floors, we would have spent approximately \$30K replacing them at least three times during the 42 year period.

Materials and labor for stripping and waxing once every four years only cost us around \$3200. Four years between stripping can be achieved by applying the proper acrylic finish for the floor situation, general damp mopping as needed, and buffing every month with a high-speed machine. Since acrylic floor finishes are the most important category of coatings due to shine and protection properties, considering that they may be applied to almost all floor types, and especially since they may also be used to protect other floor coatings, I will expound on them for the duration of this article. If a contractor can become expert at applying and maintaining acrylic finishes, laying all other types should be a piece of cake, naturally. Yes, I’m just being waggish.

Acrylic floor finishes, being water-based, are the simplest to apply, the easiest to remove, the shiniest, the best protectant; in short, the perfect choice for most resilient floors (manmade). Even some stone, ceramic tile,



concrete, and aggregates can benefit from acrylic finishes depending on the particular situation.

The rule of thumb is this: if the floor material itself allows moisture to permeate freely between the substrate and the surface, it is unlikely that a resilient floor acrylic coating should be used.

Most acrylics seal the floor so water gets trapped underneath. This can cause major issues, both with the look of the finish and with the floor material. Loosening of glue, grout, discoloration of finish, mildew buildup under finish – these are among the problems that can be experienced if an acrylic finish is incorrectly applied to the wrong floor type.

There are synthetic coatings made today that specifically allow moisture to “breathe” from the floor. Usually this type of finish is applied to ceramic tile, stone, and concrete – but not necessarily. Remember the rule above. Make sure to identify the flooring material and match the coating to that material. As long as the floor doesn’t need to breathe, acrylic floor finishes may be used.

Since acrylic finishes are strippable with standard high pH (13-14) caustic-based



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strippers, and since most other types of coatings can withstand this stout stripping agent (not all), then acrylics can be applied to protect and improve the appearance of other coating types. Examples of compatible surfaces that would benefit: epoxy paints, moisture-cured polyurethane, polyurethane undercoats.

Another rule to keep in mind is that the tougher finish is always the first applied to the surface; the softer finish is always the last. Thus, a standard resilient floor can have an under-coat "permanent sealer" applied (although no longer recommended), followed by multiple coats of acrylic. What should be noted about all this is how important it is to know your finishes and procedures. Find a competent floor finish supplier. Utilize their expertise concerning compatibilities and procedures. Know exactly what you are doing before starting a job.

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January Survey Results Industry Trade Associations

Earlier this month, eClean Magazine surveyed readers about their thoughts on industry trade associations. Despite several industry websites requesting their fans to participate in the survey, the number of responses was significantly lower than our past surveys. While we could come up with various theories as to why, they would just be guesses.

So let's look at what we do know.

Of those individuals who answered the survey, 78% had been in business at least six years, with 63% of those having been in business 10 or more years.

Of those who answered the survey, 68% were currently members of a cleaning industry trade association. The Window Cleaning Resource Association (WCRA) had the highest showing, followed by the Power Washers of North America (PWNA), with the United Association of Mobile Cleaning Contractors (UAMCC) rounding out the top three. (Keep in mind that some associations have industry bulletin boards, and the survey was promoted on those.)

Here's the part that could be of value: what industry members want from an association. Each topic could receive a score between 1 and 4. Here are the results, from most important to least important:

1. Education/Training (Score 3.5)
2. Networking with Peers (Score 3.3)
3. Discounts from Vendors (Score 3.0)
4. Marketing Materials, etc. (Score 2.9)
5. Industry Advocacy/Support (Score 2.8)
6. Association Publications (Score 2.7)
7. Certification Programs (Score 2.6)

Finally, those who answered the survey but were not members of an association listed that they did not see the value in them as their top reason for not joining (45%), followed by the answer that they just had not thought much about joining one (27%).